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THE
HEINOUSNESS AND AGGRAVATION

OF

T H E F T,

ILLUSTRATED IN A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE OLD CHURCH OF EDINBURGH
ON THE 29th OF NOV. 1787.

BY

DAVID JOHNSTON, D. D.

MINISTER OF NORTH LEITH.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND FOR PROMOTING
RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE POOR.

M.DCC.LXXXVIII.



EDINBURGH, 2d December 1787.

AT a General Meeting of the Society in Scotland for promoting
Religious Knowledge among the Poor,

RESOLVED,

THAT the thanks of this Society be given to the Rev. Dr Johnston
for his excellent Sermon; and that he be requested to furnish the So-
ciety with the Manuscript, with permission to print it.

HORATIUS CANNAN, Sec.

T O
THE SOCIETY FOR
PROMOTING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
AMONGST THE POOR,

The following Sermon,
PREACHED AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR DESIRE,

I S
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

B Y
THEIR MOST OBEDIENT
AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT

THE AUTHOR.

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HEINOUSNESS AND AGGRAVATION

OF

THEFT,

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SERMON.

EPH. iv. 28.

Let him that stole, steal no more.

MAY I not safely affirm, that there has seldom been a time in which a greater number of thefts have been committed, than of late, in this neighbourhood and country? Scarce a night passes in which some house or shop is not broke open, and property carried off, in open defiance of all laws human and divine. Numbers amongst us seem to have cast off, not only the fear of God, but all regard to human authority: Like the unjust steward in the parable,

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nable, *To dig they cannot; to beg they are ashamed*; and as they must subsist by some means, they have recourse to those which are the most guilty and criminal. How many, forgetful of character and every thing dear to men and christians, have sacrificed them all for unlawful gain, and brought themselves to an untimely death! It is deeply to be regretted, that in a country like this, where so much religious knowledge abounds, and where the principles of religion and morals are so frequently inculcated, such numbers should be entire strangers to those principles, and addicted to the grossest crimes. That I may contribute my humble endeavours to check a principle of dishonesty, I have made choice of these words of the Apostle; from which it shall be my business,

- I. *First*, To represent the heinous and aggravated nature of Theft.
- II. *And, secondly*, To give a few directions, which, by the Divine blessing, may be of use to restrain you from so criminal a practice.



I begin with representing the heinous and aggravated nature of Theft :

- i. And, *first*, It is an open contempt of the Divine authority. None, I presume, will deny the undoubted right which the Almighty hath to prescribe laws to the creatures he hath made. Having given them a place in his world, and endowed them with reason and understanding, he may enact what statutes he pleaseth, for the government of their conduct. *Is he not that great Legislator who is able to save and to destroy?* Hence, when God created man at first, he engraved a law upon his heart, *to be a light to his feet, and a lamp to his paths*; and when *that* in a great measure became effaced by his apostacy and transgression, he was pleased to renew it again upon Mount Sinai, and to inscribe it upon stone, that it might be preserved more durable and lasting. There never was so comprehensive, so concise, so perfect a system of morals, as that which the Ten Commandments contain. They were delivered with awful solemnity, in the midst of thunders and lightning and terrible majesty, in order to make deep impression upon the minds of the Israel-

ites, and excite them to obedience. *Thou shalt not steal*, is one of the sacred number; and the observation of it is essential to the existence and well-being of society. Whoever acknowledges GOD as his Sovereign and Lord, must reckon himself bound to obey whatever he hath commanded. Is he not wise in counsel, and mighty in strength? Doth not he best know what is most for the happiness of his subjects, and is it not their duty to yield submission? And yet one would think, that the eighth commandment was none of the Ten, or to be found in any one page of this blessed book. How many seem to have erased it from their Bibles as an obnoxious statute, and unworthy of regard! With what ease do they invade the property of their neighbour, and rob him of his substance! Unrestrained by every principle of justice and honesty, they openly violate them, whenever their sloth or their covetousness instigate them. Is it thus ye condemn the authority of the Almighty, and trample his laws under your feet? Have you forgotten the power with which he is armed, and the vengeance he is capable

able of inflicting? *Who hath an arm like God, or who can thunder with a voice like his?* Had you been at the foot of Mount Sinai when the lightnings flashed and the thunder roared, would you not, like Moses, *have exceedingly feared and quaked?* would you not have stood in awe to offend? would you not have vowed like the Israelites, *All these things will we do, and be obedient?* What though he now speaks to us *in the still small voice of the Gospel*, and hath published terms of peace and reconciliation to transgressors, He will not suffer his commandments to be wilfully troden under foot: *I came not, saith Christ, to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.* Reflect, I beseech you, on the aggravated nature of disregarding the Divine authority; methinks, it discovers an unfeeling, a froward, an abandoned mind. What opinion would you have of a son who despised the authority of his Parent, of a servant who disobeyed the orders of his Master, of a subject who disregarded the acts of the Legislature? Have not these been accounted enormous offences in every age of the world? Have not the guilty been treated with rigour and severity?

verity? And what must we think of those who pour contempt upon the commandments of the Almighty? Is it not a still more aggravated transgression? Does not the offence rise in proportion to the dignity of the person against whom it is committed? Believe me, he cannot be insensible of the insult offered to him, and will not suffer it to pass with impunity. Must he not be avenged of those who wantonly provoke him?

2. In the *second* place, theft and dishonesty are subversive of the interests and peace of mankind. If we will not abstain from those crimes from a respect to the Divine authority, we ought to avoid them from a regard to our own happiness. The very existence of society depends on the principles of justice and honesty being preserved sacred and inviolable. Were these to be departed from, anarchy and confusion, oppression and violence, rapine and plunder, must ensue. It is of vast consequence to trade and industry, and a great encouragement to them, that every one's property is secured to him by law and the administration of justice.

justice. Who would live in a country where he could not call *that* his own which he had earned perhaps with the sweat of his brow, and the labour of his hands? Who would toil for daily bread, if he was to be deprived of it the moment he acquired it, by the hands of the sons of violence? What would the meanest, poorest person amongst us, say, if his little pittance was to be taken from him by thieves and robbers? Would he not complain of it, and justly, as a wrong and injury done to him? Would he not pursue the guilty creature with all the vengeance of the law, and plead for redress? And canst thou do to another what thou thyself condemnest? Can that be innocent in thee, which is criminal in thy neighbour? Must not dishonesty be the same in whomsoever it is found, and render him an object of punishment?—Accordingly, all Legislators have adopted the eighth commandment into their Statute Book, and made the breach of it, in many cases, a capital offence. How many have suffered upon a gibbet for theft and robbery! Do not a greater number die for these crimes than for any other?

other? But perhaps it will be pled as an apology for dishonesty, that what is stolen is oft-times a trifling matter, and the person who received the injury could easily spare it. It may be so: But will this ever constitute a right in thee to what is thy neighbour's, or justify thy robbery? Is not the smallest trifle as much his property as that which is of greater worth? Perhaps he puts a higher value upon it than upon something of greater consequence. Besides, if thou once departest from the strict rule of honesty, there is no saying where thou mayest stop. Thy desires may increase, as the opportunities of gratifying them occur. Have not all thieves commonly begun with small things, and then proceeded to greater transgressions? The conscience, at first lively and tender, remonstrates against every departure from rectitude; but when repeated violence is offered to it, it becomes hardened, and ceases to be a re-prover. This consideration I would particularly address to servants, who often allow themselves in pilfering from their masters, things of no great consequence, but which betray them into greater iniquity.

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Does it not discover a dishonest principle, which, if not checked, may be attended with fatal consequences? Is it not a stain in thy reputation, and a blot in thy character? May it not occasion thy dismissal from a family where perhaps thou wast happy, and make thee be cast upon the world without a house to cover thee? Be assured, that no family will admit a dishonest person into it if their character is known, and thou mayest be universally shunned as a dangerous member of society. *Be, therefore, on thy guard against the very appearance of evil.* Put thy hand as soon into the fire, as touch that which is the property of thy neighbour. Endeavour to *keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God, and towards man.*

But, theft is not only subversive of the interest, but of the peace and comfort of society. With what fatal consequences have midnight assaults and robberies been attended? Have they not excited the most alarming apprehensions, and the most distracting fears? Have not women and children been thrown into the most painful agitations, and the most violent convulsions? Have not lunacy and death

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been

been sometimes the effect of midnight robberies? Who would be the occasion of such dreadful calamities for any acquisition? The gain of a world would be too dear a purchase. What an high aggravation of guilt, to have a fellow-creature's peace of mind, his comfort, his reason, perhaps his very blood, charged to thy account!

3. In the *third* place, theft and dishonesty involve the guilty oft-times in shame and misery. Perhaps they may escape for a while undetected, and may plume themselves in their art and secrecy; they may flatter themselves that no eye seeth them, and that they pass in the world for persons of some integrity and uprightness. But, what signifies such a deception, when God and their own consciences know the fallacy of it? Must not their own minds disapprove their conduct, and in a retired hour upbraid them with being rogues and villains? By and by a suspicion of their character spreads abroad, and the messengers of Justice are employed to apprehend them. How are they obliged to sculk in caves
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and dens of the earth like beasts of prey, and to shun the society of every one but of their partners in guilt ! Driven from place to place, they are in constant terror of detection, and of being delivered into the hands of the civil magistrate. At last they are apprehended, and exhibited to the world as spectacles of infamy and reproach ; a disgrace to their kindred, a pest to society, a dishonour to human nature. Canst thou figure thyself, thou son of dishonesty, drag'd alongst the streets like an ox to the slaughter ; confined in a close and lonely prison ; fed on the most scanty fare ; and suffering all the hardships of a miserable captivity ? Canst thou realize the day of solemn trial, when thou shalt be sifted before the Tribunal of Justice ; arraigned by the public prosecutor ; found guilty by unexceptionable witnesses ; and sentenced to die by a righteous Judge ? Canst thou suppose thyself remanded back to jail ; fed on bread and water ; thy hands and feet loaded with irons ; and suffering all the anguish of a guilty conscience ? Canst thou figure thyself led out to execution ; accompanied by guards and the ministers

of Justice ; suspended upon a gallows between heaven and earth ; and having that life cut off, in the bloom of youth perhaps, which might have been protracted to a good old age, and have been useful to society ? Canst thou reflect on all these things, and not be filled with horror ? Art thou not apt to exclaim, God forbid that such things should befall me ! Yet these are oft-times the fatal consequences of dishonesty. Could I suppose any one in this audience addicted to theft, I would ask, Have you no regard to character, to liberty, to life ? Is ill-gotten gain and dishonest wealth to be acquired at the expence of all ? Have you no shame, no virtuous principle left, no concern for your own happiness ? Have you cast off all sense of reputation, all fear of God, all dread of another world ? Are you willing to involve yourselves in a life of guilt, and to expose yourselves to a latter end of reproach and misery ? Is it possible that any can be so worthless and abandoned ? It is indeed shocking to reflect, how many young persons there are who, before they have acquired any other knowledge almost, are dextrous in pick-
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ing locks and pockets, and in all the other arts of dishonesty. Are not the bulk of those who are committed for theft, generally under 20 years of age? Is it not painful to think that they should be so early lost, to GOD, to themselves, to society? Is there no mean that can be thought of to reclaim such young wanderers, and to save them from ruin? Is there no antidote can be prescribed against the poison of bad principles, and a profligate practice? Yes; the Society for promoting religious knowledge amongst the poor, before whom I speak, have devised one of the best, *viz.* The instructing young people in the principles of the Gospel of CHRIST, and having their minds enriched with divine and saving knowledge. *They* have been enabled, though yet in the infancy of their institution, to open several schools, where those parents who, from indigence, are unable to give their children education, may have them instructed in the principles of religion and morals. Can you be too thankful to Providence, ye fathers and mothers, for such an institution? Will you not take the benefit of it, to get your little ones
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made acquainted with the way of salvation, and fortified against those temptations with which they are surrounded? Can you love them, and not endeavour to save them from perdition? Is it possible that any parent can be so unkind and cruel as to wink at the ignorance, and to connive at the vices of their children? And yet there is reason to fear that there are too many of this character, who, instead of restraining their little ones from theft, encourage them in the commission of it. GREAT GOD! can any of thy reasonable creatures be so worthless and abandoned? What a dreadful pitch of depravity and wickedness! Surely, if there is any one place in the fire of thy wrath hotter than another, it must be reserved for such monsters!

4. In the *fourth* place, theft and dishonesty expose the guilty to the awful judgments of GOD. Perhaps they may get through life with a doubtful, nay even an unsuspected reputation; but their rottenness and falsehood shall be laid open at the close of it. They may elude the vengeance of the Law, and the sword of Justice;

Justice; but they cannot escape the wrath of the Almighty. A thief frequently breaks the jail where he is confined, and flies to a foreign country, where he drags out a weary life in bitterness and remorse; but he cannot flee from himself, or beyond the reach of the Almighty. God can arrest him in the most secret retired corner of his wide extended empire, and inflict upon him that punishment which he so justly merits. If a halter and a gibbet, then, will make no impression upon you, O let the terrors of the LORD persuade you! Realize these frequently to your imagination, and do not expose yourselves to their weight. Do not flatter yourselves, that the torments of the damned are a mere bugbear, fit only to impose upon old women and children, as some would make you believe; they are the most terrible realities which can possibly be conceived. The rack and torture, those ingenious contrivances of human policy to render expiring life as agonizing as possible, are not once to be compared to them. *There, we are told, by Divine authority, the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; there*
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is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Could I draw aside the vail for a moment, and present to you those wretched creatures that are suffering under the wrath of God, no other argument I presume would be necessary to restrain you from dishonesty. And, is not their misery as certain as if it were exhibited before your eyes? Is not the veracity of God more to be relied upon, than even your own senses? Ought we not to give implicit credit to those declarations which he hath published, from a principle of affection? *I will forewarn you, saith our Lord, whom you should fear: Fear not them that can kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but fear him who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.* Therefore, let me address you in the words of the text, *Let him that stole, steal no more.* It is not too late to amend; *there is time and space given you for repentance.* God is not willing that any of us should perish, but that all of us should obtain everlasting life. *Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.* Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Flee to
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that blood which cleanseth from all sin, and is able to present you pure and without spot to God. Why should you add to all your other guilt, a neglect of that salvation which is offered to your acceptance? A criminal may not be able to obtain a pardon from his Sovereign; but he shall certainly receive it from God, if he makes a proper application. Whatever ye shall ask in my name, saith Christ, the Father will give you. Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

- II. I proceed, in the *second* place, to give a few directions, which, by the blessing of God, may be of use to restrain you from dishonesty. And, *1st*, Revere the Laws of God and of the Land. Represent them as standing in your way, like the Angel in the road of Balaam to oppose his journey, and venture not to transgress them. Reflect upon the high authority from which they proceed, and dare not to despise it. Consider the laws as wisely enacted for the peace and happiness of society, and that by transgressing them, you strike at the root of every thing dear to mankind. *I*

take delight in the law of the Lord, saith the Apostle, after the inward man. Give me understanding, prays the Psalmist, and I shall keep thy law ; yea I shall observe it with my whole heart. O how love I thy law ! it is my meditation all the day. What is it that constitutes genuine christians and good subjects ? Is it not obedience to the laws of GOD and of man ? Do we not forfeit the character of both, if our submission is withheld ? Without obedience, the warmest professions, and the profoundest respect, are good for nothing. Accordingly our LORD positively disclaims the character of Master to those who do not observe what he hath commanded. *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things what I say ?* Let me ask, how would you like to be accounted the enemies of GOD, and pests in society ? Are not these amongst the most odious epithets which you can possibly sustain ? Why would you do any thing to justify the application of them ? Why expose yourselves to the reproach or to the punishment of a thief ? Be assured, that the law will one day lay hold of you, and be avenged of you for transgressing it ; and
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should you escape the iron rod of justice, you cannot escape the still severer judgments of the Almighty. I am persuaded that none would ever be guilty of theft, if they apprehended they were to be exposed either to shame or to punishment. But they flatter themselves that they will never be detected; the vainest imagination which can creep into the breast. There is no wickedness so secret, but two witnesses are privy to it, God, and the Conscience; and two witnesses are sufficient to condemn us. Let the law of GOD, therefore, be the invariable rule of your life and conduct, and dare not to depart from it for any consideration. *All his commandments are holy, just and good; hide them in your hearts, that you may not sin against him. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the judgements of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is a great reward.*

2. My *second* advice is, Be careful to engage in some lawful business, and pursue it with diligence. This is the Apostle's express exhortation in the text, *Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.* When GOD created man at first, he put him into the garden of Eden, to keep and dress it: Adam was not to be idle, even in a state of innocence, but to be usefully employed. Industry is one of the best guards to virtue, and one of the greatest securities against temptation. Had our first parents been engaged in their manual labour, I am apt to think that they would not have fallen so readily into the snare of the Tempter; but they wandered from their task towards the forbidden tree, at which they should not have so much as looked. There are few things which have been productive of worse consequences than idleness: It involves men in straits, it reduces them to poverty, it tempts them to theft. The mind of man being an active principle, if it is not honestly employed, it is ten to one but it
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will be set upon mischief. Is it not in the head of the sluggard, and in the chair of the slothful, that vice is hatched, and wickedness is projected? Were they engaged in labour, the same criminal suggestions might not have arisen in their minds, or if they had, they would probably have checked and discouraged them. By tasting the sweets and gain of industry, they would be under no temptation to theft, and would hold it in abhorrence. Where is it that ease and plenty and happiness abound? is it not in the habitation of the sober, the industrious, and the good? Where is it that want and poverty and wretchedness prevail? is it not in the houses of the idle and the sluggard? By diligence and industry, men become independent, and acquire wealth and riches; they are not only enabled to support themselves and their families with credit and ease, but to assist the poor, and to relieve the necessitous. By indolence and sloth, many are reduced to want, and are forced as it were to become beggars and thieves. Hence, Solomon observes, *That the hand of the diligent maketh rich; but idleness shall clothe*

clothe a man with rags. I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down: Then I saw and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction; yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man. Piety and industry seem to be nearly allied to each other, and assist and promote one another; so far from being enemies, they are the closest and the warmest friends. Hence the Apostle exhorts us, not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. And another Apostle expressly affirms, That he that provideth not for himself, and especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

3. My *third* direction is, Beware of covetousness. This passion has sometimes been the occasion of dishonesty: by casting an evil eye on the property of thy neighbour, a desire after it may be conceived, which may become so strong as
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to baffle the best of principles, and the stoutest resolution. Hence we read in the Old Testament history, that Achan first wishfully looked upon a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment; then he coveted it, and afterwards he stole it. Achab king of Israel got possession of the vineyard of Naboth by the same guilty means. Dissatisfied with his large dominions, he conceived a strong passion for the property of Naboth. His covetousness became so violent, that when he could not procure the vineyard by purchase or exchange, he consented to put the proprietor to death. Poor Naboth must lose his life, to gratify the covetousness of a wicked prince! So dangerous it is to encourage a desire after that which is another's, as it may lead us to be guilty of the grossest crimes in order to gratify it. By being discontented with our lot, and envious of that of our neighbour, we may give way to peevishness and chagrin, and be restless and unhappy until we have got possession of the object of our desire. Make, therefore, a covenant with thine eyes, lest they should estrange thy heart from God.

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Be contented with whatever he hath conferred upon thee, and thou wilt never long for what is thy brother's; esteem thy own enjoyments the fittest and the best, and thou wilt look with indifference upon all the world besides. The Apostle Paul was stripped of every thing dear to him in this world, and was hunted up and down like a partridge upon the mountains; *yet he learnt in whatsoever state wherewith all to be content.* The superior circumstances of his persecutors were nothing to him, and he beheld them without the smallest spark of envy.

4. My *last* advice is, Avoid the company of the dishonest. *Evil communications have a direct tendency to corrupt good manners.* Few people are proof against their influence, and have been carried greater lengths than they meant to go. There are numbers, I am afraid, whose business it is to seduce others into vice, and who encourage them in the commission of it. Houses of rendezvous, if I may so call them, are opened in every corner, where every art is used to betray the simple, and to entice the virtuous. The prospect
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of gain and profit is the great bait which is held forth to view, and will be pressed with all its strength. Hence we find a band of villains thus reasoning in the first chapter of the book of Proverbs, *Come, say they, to some innocent stranger, Cast in thy lot amongst us, let us all have one purse; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil.* But it follows, *My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.* Indeed you cannot be too jealous of evil doers, or too much upon your guard against them: avoid their haunts; shun their society, as you would do death and hell; by their influence and example, many young and virtuous have been completely ruined. Well skilled in the arts of seduction, and seared as with a hot iron, they will endeavour to stifle conscience within thee, and to silence all thy fears. Thy greatest safety is to keep at a distance, *and to loathe the garments spotted with iniquity;* if thou once listenest to their specious tale, and tamperest with temptations, thou art undone. *O my soul! come not thou into their*
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secret;

secret ; into their assembly, mine honour, be thou not united. Consider bad men as the enemies of thy peace and salvation, and avoid all manner of intercourse with them.

These are the best advices I can think of ; may God enable you to reduce them to practice ! This subject, I am sensible, will be very unacceptable to some individuals, and they will have heard it with prejudice ; but it is not the less useful and necessary. *Should I seek to please men, I should not be the servant of Christ.* I have had no particular person in view, in any thing I have said ; but if there is any one in this audience who thinks himself pointed at, and whose conscience pleads guilty, the discourse was certainly intended for him, and he should apply it to himself. The great object of all preaching is to awaken the secure, and to reclaim the profligate ; and where these ends are promoted, a great point is gained.

I conclude the discourse, with an address to Parents.—Permit me to remind you, that children are lent to you by the ALMIGHTY, that you may train
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them up to be comforts to yourselves, and useful in the world. You are answerable to GOD, and to Society, for the instructions which you give them, and the example which you set before them. Breed in them a reverence for GOD, for his Name, for his Word, for his Sabbath, for his House. Suffer not a contempt of either of these, to escape your observation, or the lashes of your censure. Inculcate at all times a regard to Religion, to Justice, to Honesty, to Truth. It depends upon you, under GOD, whether the rising generation be sober and virtuous, or wicked and graceless. You have the forming of their minds, and the inspection of their morals, to which you must pay the strictest attention. If the lessons you inculcate are sound and pure, and the reproofs which you administer are seasonable and dispassionate, you have done your duty, and shall receive your reward: But if you are careless and negligent, remiss and slothful, you will incur the displeasure of the ALMIGHTY, and draw down the curse of posterity. I cannot help attributing much of the vice and wickedness, and especially the theft

and dishonesty which abound, to the carelessness and inattention of parents. Is it possible that there would be such a number of young creatures under sixteen years of age addicted to theft and robbery, if their parents were at pains to point out the guilt and danger of those crimes? Ye fathers and mothers, can you be so unkind and cruel as to contribute to the ruin of your offspring? Can you be so void of natural affection, and of every principle of religion and humanity? But perhaps you plead inability to give your little ones that education which you wish; your straitned circumstances in life prevent you from putting them to school: But whatever apology this might have been formerly, it cannot now be sustained; That Society lately erected in this city, to which I formerly alluded, have supplied what you complain of, and have appointed able Teachers to instruct your children in the principles of religion and morals; and that too, *without money, and without price.* Amidst all that dissipation and profligacy with which the age too much abounds, there are not a few whose hearts are warmed with the
love

love of CHRIST, and with an ardent zeal to promote the best interests of mankind. May GOD increase their number ! The establishment of Sunday Schools every where through the land, will be a memorable anecdote in the annals of this century, and will transmit the names of their worthy Founders to posterity with respect and honour. Many thousands will call them blessed. You are now without excuse, ye fathers and mothers, if you suffer your little ones to continue strangers to the great things which belong to their peace. Embrace with thanksgiving and joy, the precious opportunities which you have, of getting them made wise unto salvation. I beseech you for your own sake, for your childrens sake, for GOD's sake, to take advantage of the means of instruction, and oblige your little ones to attend them. Be careful that they are strict and regular in their attendance, as the only way by which they can profit and improve. The minds of young people are often averse to what is good, and to what gives them trouble. But this backwardness you must endeavour to subdue by encouragements, by promises,

promises, by rewards; and when these are ineffectual, by correction and chastisement. *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, saith the wise man; but correction will drive it out.* And may ALMIGHTY GOD, whose blessing giveth efficacy to every mean, and to every institution, crown *your* endeavours, and the pious labours of this Society, with abundant success! Amen.



F I N I S.

SUMMARY ACCOUNT

O F

The Society in Scotland for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor.

THE alarming decline of Religion, and the rapid progress of immorality, particularly among the lower classes of men, some time ago suggested to a number of persons in this city, the (idea of) making an attempt to counteract the growing evil. Convinced that its principal source was to be found in the total want of religious impressions on the hearts of the multitude, and that this in a great measure arose from their gross and deplorable ignorance, their primary aim was to furnish them with such means of instruction as were best fitted to bring them to a just acquaintance with the Truths of Christianity. For this purpose, they formed themselves into 'A Society for promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor;' and after much consultation, adopted the plan which seemed most likely to accomplish that object.

They set out with distributing a number of Bibles, Testaments, and Religious Treatises, calculated to convey to the uninformed, a clear and practical knowledge of the doctrines and duties of the Gospel. To enforce these instructions, they afterwards proceeded, as their funds would permit, to institute Catechetical Exercises, where, every Lord's Day Evening, all that should choose to attend, might have an opportunity of hearing the Truths of Religion explained and applied.

These measures, even in the limited extent to which the Society have been enabled to carry them, they have the satisfaction to think, have been attended with considerable success. But besides distributing as gifts, many Catechisms of different kinds, and Religious Treatises, as well as Bibles and Testaments, they have collected a small Library of useful and practical religious books, which are *lent* out to those who

who are disposed to read them, but whose circumstances put it out of their power to purchase them. Five Catechists for the instruction of the ignorant Poor, examined and recommended as excellently qualified by Ministers of character in the Church, are already in their service.—In Edinburgh, two Catechetical Exercises, one in the English, and one in the Erse language, are carried on every Lord's Day Evening, the first in Carrubber's close, the other in Blackfriars wynd, and are attended by numbers with every mark of seriousness and attention.—Another established in the District of Portsburgh, has been followed with equal success.—At Perth and Dundee, two others have been instituted, both of them well-attended, and meeting with the countenance of the Ministers and most respectable inhabitants.—Measures are taken for instituting another at Leith; and several more are proposed to be set up, as soon as the funds of the Society, and other circumstances, will permit.

Upon the institution of the Society, the Ministers in this city, and the neighbourhood, very readily gave it their countenance and support; and a number of them, being applied to, cheerfully agreed to second their intentions, by preaching Sermons adapted to the design of the Society, once in every quarter of the year, in one of the churches of Edinburgh. The money collected upon these occasions, is for the use of the Society. And it was their request that these Sermons should be particularly directed against the prevailing vices of the times. Several have already been preached; and Dr Johnston, in compliance with the common request, which till now had not been agreed to, permitted the present discourse to be published for their benefit.

The Society are happy in acknowledging the countenance and support they have already received from the Public; and beg leave to assure them, it shall be their business and study, to apply every donation received in such manner as may most effectually promote the important objects of this institution.

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